School for Housewives

by Marion Harland

Linen Versus Cotton

Mrs. Sterling's Ways No. XXV

"I HAVE old-fashioned ideas upon some subjects, I suppose!"

We have heard her say it so often, and she is so beautifully unconscious at each repetition of ever having used the phrase before—and we are so certain when it slips from her tongue that it presages something particularly well worth hearing—that a meaning glance ran around the circle unseen by the speaker.

"For example, I don't like to see a young girl—or an old one, for that matter—in a street car, bareheaded. And while I acknowledge that it may be safer for a woman to ride astride in divided skirts than in the old way, I cling to the fancy that the side-saddle and flowing habit were more graceful. They tell me that the good and gracious English Queen smokes cigarettes, and that hundreds of other refined and virtuous matrons do the same. The sight of a woman with a cigarette in her mouth is always a fresh shock to my antiquated self. 'Nice' girls did not waltz in my day. It wasn't very long before that time that Byron—who was assuredly the reverse of fastidious—wrote his protest against the then new French dance:

"'What you've touched you may take—
Pretty waltzer! adieu!'

"I no longer shrink from seeing a girl whirled around the room with a man's arms about her waist and her head on his shoulder. Custom has made it proper. But I do not think the waltz graceful in any of its variations. Sometimes it is grotesque. As, for instance, when, as I saw, at a large affair at Bar Harbor, some years ago, a young fellow wind himself into a gigantic cocoon by catching his heel in his partner's long train, and whirling so fast that a few turns brought the couple up all standing face to face. It was convulsively funny to everybody except the principals in the scene. But I was glad the girl was not my daughter!

"That was not what I began to speak of! Mrs. Bistre was speaking of the exquisitely fine cambric sheets she has been buying and at what an exorbitant price."

"Positively ruinous!" ejaculated that lady. "I really can hardly think it was moral for me to get them. Mr. Bistre says there must be a trust in cambrics."

"I was brought up to think linen sheets the ne plus ultra of bed-coverings," Mrs. Sterling sighed, in tender reminiscence. "It was like a sweet breath from the past when, at a visit I paid to a Delaware colonial homestead last year, I was put to sleep between sheets as fine as my pocket handkerchief, trimmed with real old lace, and bearing in one corner the monogram of my hostess' mother and the date '1830.' They were to me the very poetry of slumber robes."

"Heavenly!" cried Mrs. Martin. "At the South everybody who is anybody has linen sheets in summer. Some use nothing else at any season. Yet a fashionable woman told me the other day that she 'couldn't bear the feeling of linen sheets!' Do you know I caught myself wondering if she were not of common stock!"

This was going a little too far for some of us, and we explained that it was quite possible for one to be of good lineage and well-bred, yet not consider linen sheets a necessity of gentle living.

Mrs. Gray had a funny story to tell of two old sisters in New Jersey—both widows for many a year and living in an ancient homestead—who mentioned to her that they made a point of keeping one pair of real linen sheets on hand—"in case of death, you know."

"What connection death had in their minds with linen sheets, they did not explain," concluded the narrator.

Mrs. Sterling knew:

"In the very old times of our country, before we shed our 'old country' customs, and sought out inventions of our own, it would not have been thought decent to 'lay a body out' in anything but linen. As soon as it was prepared for the shroud, the bed on which it was to await the coffin was made up with linen sheets. If the family was too poor to own a pair, they were borowed from a neighbor.

"Perhaps because 'fine linen' has honorable mention in Holy Writ, a sort of reverence is attached to it in simple minds. Apart from the value given by custom and superstition, linen of any quality has advantages over cotton which cannot be ignored.

"It goes without saying that a cotton handkerchief is a solecism—an offense to comfort, to taste and conventional usage. Be it as fine as a cobweb, it is a vulgarity. For such uses linen's—not 'motley'—your only wear.' It is cool where cotton is heating to the fevered body. In the sickroom and in the hospital it is indispensable. Or so say those who should be the best judges of the comparative merits of the two. As a child, I was taught that to throw a bit of old linen away was a sin. Now, that I am old, I have not departed from the way in which I was trained in this respect. 'Soft, old, worn-out linen,' says a friend, who is the superintendent of a cancer hospital, 'cannot be bought in the market place, yet we must have it. If housewives would recollect this necessity and save for our sufferers every scrap which is too "tender" to be of use to them, and send to me, it would be a blessing those who know nothing of our conditions cannot appreciate.'"

"You make me feel like a criminal!" cried Mrs. Greene. "Why, I packed off a roll of linen rags to the paper mill this very day!"

"See that you never do it again!" returned the hostess, with mock severity. "Linen pillow cases are a must-have to the well as to the sick in hot weather. Every family should have a supply on hand the year 'round. If they are too expensive for everyday use, they should be kept against the evil day of illness or accident.

"This same keeping is a matter that has too little attention. The absorbent properties which are one of the virtues of linen dispose it to mildew and must when improperly stored. Many a careful housemother is dismayed, upon unpacking the cherished stores of her linen chest, after her return from the summer vacation, to find napery and body clothing spattered with tiny brown spots—'like freckles,' as one distressed woman wrote to me the other day. She was the more astonished because the chest was left in a dry closet, opening out of her bedroom. 'A hot, dry place,' she said. Linens must have air, and a change of air now and then, or they will 'freckle!' My own linen room—as I like to call it, although it is only a light closet—is one of my weaknesses. I let nobody but myself put away or give out so much as a towel. When the week's wash is sent upstairs I sort it with my own hands, allotting to each article its proper place. I observe a regular system of rotation in the use of sheets, counterpanes, bureau scarfs, pillow cases, towels, table cloths, and the like. Those which were washed this week are laid apart from last week's supply. Beds should never be made up with freshly laundered linen, no matter how well aired it may be. In laying out bed clothes and towels I draw upon those that were washed several weeks ago, taking them in due order—an order known to myself alone—which insures the even wear of each set. I take each new supply from the bottom of the pile, working gradually upward until all have gone through the laundress' hands. It is a primitive process, learned from my mother, but I have found no better."

Mrs. White had been visibly restless for some minutes. She broke the thread of the lecture at this point.

Exactness in Little Duties.

"Pardon me! but is it worth while to spend as much of the gray matter that distinguishes us from the brutes that perish—thoughtflakes, you know—in considering from which of, say, twenty piles of woven flax, shall be drawn the pillow cases for the servants' bed? Does not this long and serious discussion of a subject better suited—excuse me again—for the talk of our maids than for drawing room chat—does it not, I say, go to prove that we women are as men insist, deficient in the sense of proportion?"

The criticism was felt by the rest of us to be ill-judged, if not ill-bred. By general consent, we had fallen into the way of bringing domestic problems of every kind to the hospitable tea table for debate and solution. Our informal coterie was not a woman's club, nor yet a fashionable function!

Before even Mrs. Martin could find her tongue, Mrs. Sterling put out her hand for a dainty volume that lay on a desk within arm's length. Her smile was never gentler; her voice was steady and sweet:

"Have I ever talked to you of and out of this little book? I call it 'my daily tonic.' May I read you something I found in it today?

"'Definite work is not always that which is cut and squared for us but that which comes as a claim upon the conscience, whether it's nursing in a hospital or hemming a handkerchief.'

"Intelligent attention to household duties 'comes as a claim upon my conscience.'

"Here is another 'bracer:'

"'Exactness in little duties is a wonderful source of cheerfulness.'

"A man, one of our critics, said that—no less a person than F. W. Faber.

"And our own Great Heart, a man of the world, a world that is ever so much better for his having lived in it—J. R. Lowell—writes of his perfect woman:

"'No simplest duty is forgot.
Life hath no dim and lowly spot
That doth not in her sunshine share.
She doeth little kindnesses
Which most leave undone, or despise.
For naught that sets one heart at ease,
And giveth happiness or peace,
Is low-esteemed in her eyes.'

"And there is a deal of peace—if not happiness—in a well appointed linen closet, and comfort in all manner of linen, down to the last shred of lint scraped for a cancer hospital."

Screens for Summer Houses.

Though not so necessary in summer as in winter, screens form an important addition to every country home. In bedrooms especially they are practically indispensable, while they are useful in down-stairs rooms and even on a porch to shut off the strong draft or to form a background for a picturesque corner.

Naturally, summer screens differ decidedly from those in use in winter. They are less elaborate in design and workmanship, and are lighter, both in color and in the materials employed to make them up.

For bedrooms nothing gives greater satisfaction than a plain three-ply frame of wood to match the furniture, smoothly covered with gray cretonne or chintz in the same tone as the other room decorations. Most cool and airy also are screens in which white dotted swiss—a very large dot is particularly stylish—is ruffled over plain panels of pink, blue, green, or yellow satine. The swiss should be run on the rods by a casing, with an inch heading both above and below.

Softly shirred silkcline is also much used for bedroom screens. These in the new weathered oak frames are particularly good style.

The plain matting screens so serviceable and cool-looking are less used than formerly though, like certain patterns in silver, they have a faculty of holding their own.

For downstairs, either in library or dining room, the weathered oak frame is in high favor.

One of specially good appearance was made up with a tapestry denim "stretcher" shining through an all-over wooden design of the weathered oak.

A unique summery screen was of green burlap below, with a twelve-inch panel at the top of each of the four panels, on which was painted a woodland scene typical of the season.

Still another screen and one easily copied at home in any color or flower was of dull blue denim, over the surface of which great bunches of dark red poppies, with their green leaves, were appliqued.

As most of these screens can be copied at small cost or can be bought for little more, every woman should see to it that her bedrooms, at least, are provided with one to cut off the view of the washstand or to stand between the bed and an open window on cool nights.

THE HOUSEMOTHER'S EXCHANGE

THE craze for coloring carpets on the floor is spreading. I give room to the story of another essay in this line, without, however, indorsing the process or assuming to know anything whatever of it beyond what respectable correspondents tell us has been done by themselves or under their eyes by others. Thus far no one has reported upon the wearing qualities of the dyes the ingenious housewife has applied. If they fade speedily, is not the last end of that carpet worse than the first? Will somebody testify on this point? Is the reformation permanent?

In reply to "H. L.'s" inquiry as to the possibility of dyeing a carpet on the floor—like yourself, I had never until then heard of such an experiment. But it gives me an idea, and I have experimented upon a faded rag carpet. It was green in strips, faded to the dirty yellow. These strips were made bright green by the use of blue dye. I deepened the alternate stripes of red by applying red dye. No one would guess that it had been dyed on the floor. It is a very different looking carpet now—immensely improved.

If "H. L." would like further particulars, please give her my address. I do not see why it would not do equally well on Brussels, if one would use dye intended for woolen goods.

Mrs. F. A. P., West Valley, N. Y.

The Use of Rotten Stone.

Our next letter is from the seat of war—otherwise, the kitchen of the writer. One may be sure it is a pleasant kitchen, through which the fresh air has leave to wander at its will. There is a rocking chair for weary moments when rest is a duty, and in one corner, near a vine-shaded window, we place the brisk, brave housemother at another table than that draped by the ironing sheet.

I leave my ironing to address a few lines to the Exchange Council Board, if I may be allowed the privilege.

"B. B. W.'s" way of preserving eggs for winter use is the same as mine, and mine has never failed. If "H. G. E." would keep hers in a place where the salt will remain slightly moist she might find it more successful—the process, I mean.

May I ask how to clean and brighten a steel frying pan which has darkened? Also, how to use rotten stone?

I find both profit and pleasure in the "chats." Mrs. M. A. (Pakenham, Ont.)

Discover the use of rotten stone by making it into a paste and coating the steel utensil with it, having first washed it well in hot suds and wiped it perfectly dry with a woolen cloth, rubbing hard to get off the loose rust. Leave the paste on for a day or a night. Then with a bit of flannel and dry, powdered, rotten stone polish the steel.

Rotten stone was a favorite cleansing medium with our grandmothers, and is returning to favor in the sight of their grandchildren, after many years of comparative disuse. It is a sort of clayey limestone, which, by exposure to the weather, has become friable. When pulverized it is a soft, velvety dust, excellent for cleaning brass and other metals.

Using Old Rubbers.

The person who complained of the unworthiness of old rubbers—asserting that they are liable to leak at the second using—has, no doubt, in opening her cans used some sharp instrument to let the air in, and in so doing turned up the edge of the zinc. If she will lay this cover on the table or other flat surface and with a hammer "bead" it down even she will require but one rubber for two years—and the remedy is so easy!

A. BUTTINSKY (Tonawanda, N. Y.).

tive. Take a can-opener and press hard, running it around the rim of the cover. As this is by now hot, the edge may be pressed down into the rubber so that it is hardly practicable to remove it again. And here is another little hint that may be of use to many. In opening a can I run a small paring knife around the top between rubber and jar, then loosen a bit of the rubber by help of the point of the knife and pull the rubber from under the cover, after which the top may be removed without injury to it, and more quickly than by hot water. I forgot to say the jars should stand in hot water while you are filling them.

PEACHES.

Stone, pare, and halve the fruit, which should be sound and not overripe. Use a half pint of water to each pound of fruit. Put over the fire, heat gradually and boil slowly for twenty minutes. Fill your heated jars with the boiling fruit, dipping from the kettle with a perforated strainer. When each jar is three-quarters full pour in enough of the still-boiling juice to run it over and screw down the tops. The rubbers should be fitted to their places before the filling is begun.

Peaches canned in this manner without sugar are nice for pies, for shortcake or to be eaten at breakfast with cream and sugar as when fresh. When used as a dessert, open about fifteen minutes before serving and sweeten to taste.

I can rhubarb in the same way, after peeling and cutting it in short lengths. Add just enough water to prevent burning, as the rhubarb is juicy enough without it. Boil not a minute longer than is needed to heat the fruit thoroughly.

TOMATOES.

Peel, half or quarter, according to size; drain off about one-third of the superfluous juice and boil slowly about ten minutes after the boil really begins. Fill the jars to overflowing from the kettle, which should remain on the fire at a steady boil until the last jar is full. Be sure that no air is left in the jars after they are sealed and that the tops are, screwed on evenly and securely, and you will find them as fresh when you come to use them as if they had been just gathered. I never put salt or sugar into tomatoes in canning.

Strained through a sieve and canned hot they are nice for soups and sauces, for those who prefer them without the seeds.

Don't publish this if you think it is too long. I have noticed from time to time queries as to the best method of canning tomatoes without losing their freshness and color, and thought this might help somebody.

If I have been of any assistance I may come again. K. E. B.

You will be welcome always. We are certain of getting something good when-

More About Canning.

Much of our space today will be devoted to canning—a business which engrosses the thoughts of hundreds of housemothers at this time of year. Wise provision for the appetite of one's family in the winter makes the labor imperative when days are hottest, and heart and flesh rebel at the thoughts of standing over a roaring fire for hours, the steam of cooking sweets in the nostrils and the reek of boiling vegetables warring against the idea that the parboiled woman will ever endure to eat them.

Our correspondent, whose directions are given first, meets the necessity gallantly, and takes hold with a will:

As the canning season is upon us, let me add my mite of help to your already helpful corner by telling my sister housewives how I can fruits without sugar.

Peaches, tomatoes, rhubarb, blackberries, etc., retain to a remarkable degree the fine flavor of fresh fruit if canned in this way. For the last nine years I have put up two pars of each kind annually and never had one spoil. There is no reason why any fruit canned without sugar should not keep if the tops and the rubbers are in perfect order. Some of my jars have been nine years in use.

Do it in this way and you will have no trouble as to keeping what you put up:

After filling jars to overflowing screw down the tops; turn the jars upside down; if you hear the air hiss in escaping, your tops or the rubbers are defective. Take a can-opener and press hard, running it around the rim of the cover. As this is by now hot, the edge may be pressed down into the rubber so that it is hardly practicable to remove it again. And here is another little hint that may be of use to many. In opening a can I run a small paring knife around the top between rubber and jar, then loosen a bit of the rubber by help of the point of the knife and pull the rubber from under the cover, after which the top may be removed without injury to it, and more quickly than by hot water. I forgot to say the jars should stand in hot water while you are filling them.

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You will be welcome always. We are certain of getting something good when-ever you put pen to paper in our behalf.

I wish hundreds of other housewives would follow your lead in telling their sister workers how they have made experiments in the wide field where we are all toiling; how they have succeeded—and even of their failures. As I have said and written times without number, the next best thing to knowing how to do a thing right is to know how not to do it.

Exclude the Rays of Light.

Without vanity, I may congratulate myself upon the fact that my "canned goods" (as the now crestfallen "preservers" and packers call them) keep well from one season to the other. That they do not hold over from year to year is because they are all eaten up. I attribute my good fortune, in a large measure, to my practice of wrapping every jar of fruit or vegetables in what is known as "butchers' paper." I keep them in a cool, dry place, and the thick envelope secures the darkness required to retain color and integrity. For—as every housekeeper and cook ought to know, if she does not—light works a chemical change in the character of acids and of sweets that turn to acid under certain circumstances. Furthermore, the heavy paper helps maintain the equable temperature without which preserved foods are almost sure to spoil.

M. A. H. M. (Providence, R. I.).

A new and acceptable contributor.